GOLFING OUT OF YOUR MIND

Moving Beyond Swing Mechanics

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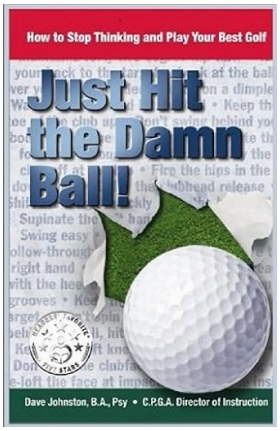
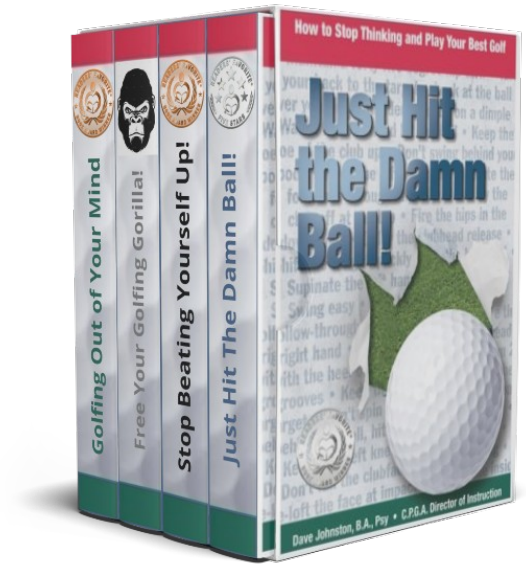


COLLECTED WORKS


Golfing Out of Your Mind
Free Your Golfing Gorilla!
Stop Beating Yourself Up!
Just Hit The Damn Ball!
How to Stop Thinking and Play Your Best Golf
Just Hit the Damn Ball!
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Just Hit The Damn Ball! book series.

Readers Favorite Five Star Reviews

TESTIMONIALS

“Golfing Out of Your Mind (Moving Beyond Swing Mechanics) simplifies complex points and presents them in a manageable, readable, and most importantly, instantly applicable way. Well done. Great job!”

Dr. Karl Morris, Europe’s Leading Mind Coach.

"Golfing Out of Your Mind will not only show you how to stop working against yourself when playing golf; the tips and wisdom shared within these pages can be put to use in just about any other sport or aspect of your life. This book is highly recommended for anyone who wants to improve their performance in golf, sports and life."

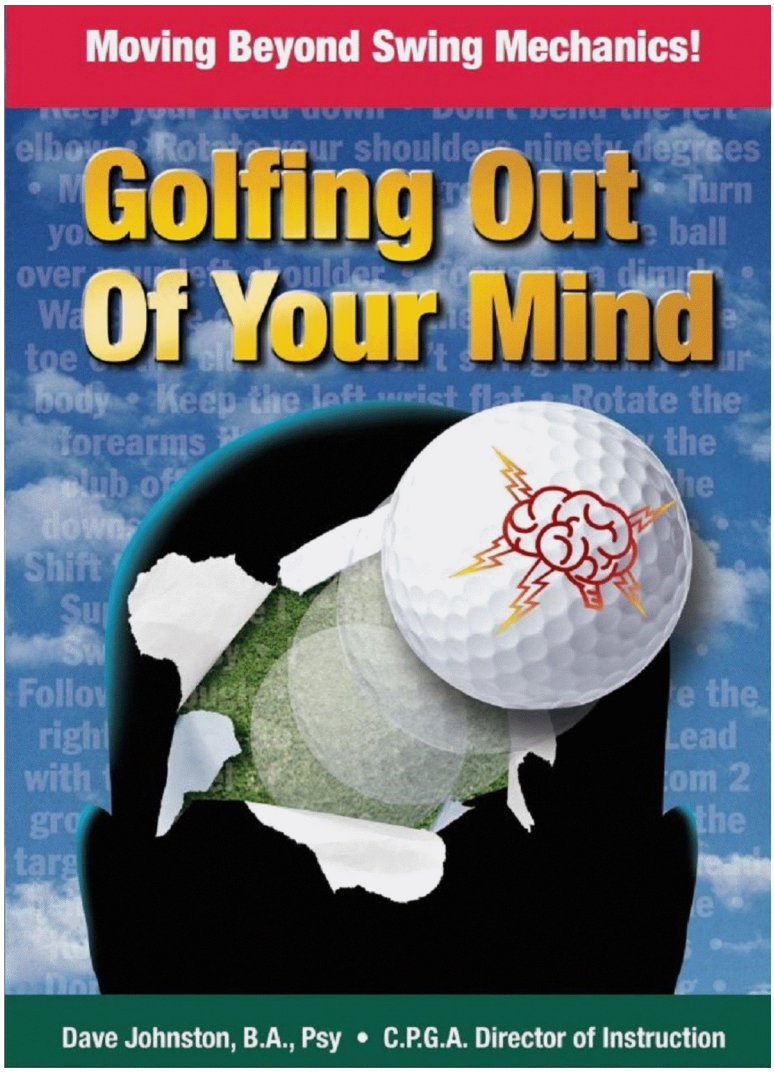
Jack Magnus, Reader’s Favourite Review.

“Golfing Out of Your Mind is an astonishing book that every part-time golfer
should read!”

Stefan Vucak, Reader’s Favorite Review.

“If this book (Golfing Out of Your Mind) has the same effect on yours as it did on mine, it will be the best few dollars you have ever spent!”

Verified Amazon Review.


Moving Beyond Swing Mechanics!
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FOREWORD

Thank you to the eleven-thousand students for affirming my belief that the secret to constant improvement for the once-a-week golfer is overcoming an obsession with perfect form. The biggest challenge to improvement is that there are no absolutes - only guidelines.

Adopting this maxim as the basis for professional instruction would be more rewarding for the student and teacher. Are we (as instructors) helping the average golfer who simply wants to be more consistent, by insisting that proper form is a prerequisite for improvement?

How can we describe the ideal swing when every Tour player is unique? An aesthetically pleasing swing is nice to have, but not necessarily a symbol of technical efficiency. Revealing common misconceptions could be the starting point to help the “average” golfer understand the much ballyhooed axiom that game is ninety percent mental

I look forward to helping you discover the game that lies beyond swing mechanics!

INTRODUCTION

This story is based on true events. Names have not been changed to protect the innocent. Any resemblance to golfers you know (perhaps intimately) is purely intentional.

Our story takes place at the Cedarbrae Golf and Country Club in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The private golf course has been the locale for numerous provincial and local events over the past twenty years. Meandering through the course is the Rouge River, which provides an aesthetic backdrop and deceptive trap for the unsuspecting golfer.

The original design by Robbie Robinson has endured for thirty-two years. While it has undergone significant updates in keeping with modern-day design, the layout remains an outstanding challenge for golfers at all skill levels.

This is a unique day in the life of our protagonist Jonathan.
He is about to have the walls of his fundamental beliefs about the game completely shattered – and he is not a happy camper!

We join Jonathan en route to the club for his Wednesday afternoon game. He always arrives one hour early and claims his regular spot at the end of the practice range for forty-five minutes before teeing off. This inviolate practice routine has been guided for years by the belief that effective muscle memory can only be developed by countless hours of practice.

Jonathan plays weekly and shoots in the low to mid nineties with an occasional sojourn into the eighties. Subscribing to every golf publication, a dozen Youtube channels, and a garage full of training aids, he dreams of finding the “secret” that could vault him into the rarefied air of the single digit golfer. The occasional brilliant shot fosters a growing belief that the recipe for breaking through the “glass ceiling” is imminent.

As he turns into the parking lot, he is confronted by cars scattered everywhere. Jonathan swerves and narrowly misses a car parked askew in the driveway. The parking lot has overflowed. Vehicles are parked on the banks and hillsides. His regular spot is occupied by two cars jammed together. Muttering audibly, he manages to squeeze into a space reserved for visitors at the farthest point from the clubhouse.

“*What the heck is going on?”*

Jonathan slides out the passenger side door, gestures emphatically at the two cars, then marches up the curving cobblestone path towards the clubhouse. Glancing up, he is confronted by a phalanx of golfers advancing towards him. As the wave floats around him, he catches snippets of conversations about a new golf “instruction” book.

Above the sea of heads, Jonathan sees one of his regular playing partners in the throng and pulls him aside.

“Hey Barry, what’s going on?”

“Didn’t you see the newsletter? It’s a book signing by the author of Just Hit The Damn Ball! The guy’s at a table in front of the Pro shop. Better hurry, I think there’s only a few copies left!”

Jonathan frowns. “So, are we playing today?”

“Not today. After reading this book, I have some homework to do. As Moe Norman was fond of saying, “*try smarter – not harde*r”. I’ll catch up with you next week.” As Barry walks away, Jonathan shakes his head and frowns.

‘*Must be something in the coffee…all this nonsense over another golf book. When will golfers learn that you can’t change your game just by reciting mantras*?’

As the Pro shop comes into view, he sees Tim, the third member of his group, near the front of the book-signing line flipping through the pages and sighing softly. Jonathan slips into the queue beside Tim, much to the displeasure of the lady behind.

For the past five years, Tim could always be found at his regular spot on the practice range between 10:00 am and 12:00 pm every day. His practice regimen was legion to every player at the club. Jonathan grasps Tim’s forearm and tugs gently.

“Not you too, Tim. Come on. We still have time to hit a small bucket before our tee time.”

Distractedly, Tim scans the back panel of the book and nods in silent agreement.

“Mmm...what? Oh, sorry Jonathan. I’ve decided to skip our game this week and focus on some new mental techniques. Did you know that your handicap is a habit? See you next week.”

Tim cradles his autographed copy then slips out of line. Jonathan stares after him, dumbfounded: *‘what the hell does that mean?’* He is jolted back to the present by the lady behind him.

“Are you going to get your book signed or not?”

“What...uh...sorry.”

As Jonathan turns around, he is face to face with the author.

“Hi. Thanks for coming. Glad you enjoyed the book. What would you like me to write?” Jonathan’s eyes dart right and left. Only three copies left. He automatically picks one up. “Uh...”

The lady behind Jonathan glances at her watch and sighs. Recognizing the predicament, the author interjects.

“How about this? The past doesn’t equal the future.”

“Uh, sure...whatever.”

The author signs the book. As he extends his hand, Jonathan leans in close and whispers: “I know what you’re doing.”

“I’m sorry…”

“You’re misleading these golfers by telling them that the game is all in their head. The secret is dedicated practice and perfect mechanics. It takes years of practice to ingrain the correct muscle memory.”

The author simply smiles and responds, “Are you playing today?”

“I was, but my regular foursome bailed on me after reading your book. I don’t like playing alone. I guess I’ll just spend the afternoon on the practice range.”

Jonathan turns abruptly, apologizes to the lady behind and heads back to the car.

Smiling wistfully, the author calls out, “Thanks for coming!”

Jonathan shakes his head and walks away, muttering audibly,

‘*That’s just great. Today was the day I wanted to try out the latest tip I saw on YouTube. If I can just figure out how to rotate the back of my left wrist at the top of my backswing like Dustin Johnson, I should be able to get another twenty yards off the tee.’*

He cavalierly tosses the book into the trunk and laces up his golf shoes so tight that he snaps a lace. Jonathan swears softly, snatches up his golf bag and heads towards the driving range. He is unaware that his inner dialogue becomes audible to fellow golfers.

'*Try smarter, what a lot of nonsense*. *You have to develop proper technique, otherwise you'll keep making the same mistakes over and over. Golfers are so gullible*.'

Jonathan strides menacingly to the far end of the practice range, venting his frustration on the occasional stray range ball in his path. He topples his bag onto a stand and flings the Driver headcover onto the ground.

As Jonathan decimates the pyramid of range balls, he is vaguely aware of someone coming down the line dispensing advice. A black cloud gathers overhead as he grows more disturbed by the second. Trying to ignore the growing conversation, Jonathan focuses on large divots in front. Suddenly, his line of sight is infiltrated by the toes of blue Foot Joy teaching shoes.

And now the story begins...

"Hi. Nice to see you again. How's the practice going?"

'It was the author. Great. The one person Jonathan didn't want to see.'

"Fine. I don't need any help, but thanks for the offer."

“Actually, I didn’t come over to give advice. I feel badly for disrupting your game, so I have a proposition for you.”

“Which is?”

“How about you play nine holes and I accompany you? I’m working on material for another book, and you won’t have to play alone - it could prove interesting for both of us. What do you think?”

Jonathan’s initial reaction was to dismiss the idea, but upon further consideration, this might be the perfect opportunity for exposing this guy as a complete phony.

“Why not? Let me hit a few more balls and I’ll meet you on the first tee.”

“Great! See you there!”

A sly smile crept across Jonathan’s face as he muttered, *‘This ought to be good. I can show this guy up as a fraud in no time. If only Tim and Barry were here to see this.’*

Jonathan hit a few more drives, each one with varying degrees of left to right curve. He sighs, plunks the driver back in the bag and heads for the first tee. The author was sitting on the bench beside the ballwasher holding a pocket notebook in one hand and a Sharpie pen in the other.

“The name’s Dave. I appreciate you letting me tag along. Sorry, I didn’t catch your name?”

“Jonathan, my friends call me J.L.”

“Which do you prefer?”

“Jonathan.”

As he plopped a Titleist Pro V1 into the ball washer, Jonathan noticed his bag stood alone beside the White tees.

“Do you actually play or just write books?”

“Oh, I manage to get in one or two rounds a month. My schedule is rather tight these days.”

‘I knew it.’ thought Jonathan. *‘An armchair psychologist who thinks he knows the psyche of a real golfer*.’

“So, you’re not playing today?” Jonathan asked.

“This is about your game not mine. Think of me as a spectator. I’m just jotting down some notes as we go…”

‘Lame excuse.’, thought Jonathan, *‘This guy probably can’t break ninety*. *I’ll show him a thing or two.’*

Dave flips open a pocket notebook, stops scribbling momentarily and looks up.

“Do you mind if I ask you something?”

“Knock yourself out…”

“I couldn’t help but notice you on the practice range. Why do you spend most of your time practicing with the Driver?”

In a tone tinged with sarcasm, Jonathan replied, “I think it’s fairly obvious. If I can hit the Driver well, then I should be able to hit the irons.”

“Does it work in reverse?”

“What?”

“I mean…if you’re struggling with the Driver, does that translate to the irons?”

Jonathan just rolled his eyes and walked ahead to the first tee.

HOLE NUMBER ONE

“Good swings can lower the highest score you can shoot,
but a good mental attitude can lower the lowest score you can shoot.”

Dr. Bob Rotella

HOLE NUMBER ONE

SHADES OF FUTURE PAST

The first hole is a relatively short, three-hundred and twenty-six-yard par four. The fairway slopes gradually away for about two hundred yards, then drops off sharply to a narrow green twenty feet below.

Dave flipped open the notebook.

“Would you mind if I ask some questions as we go along?”

“No worries, as long as you don’t offer any advice.”

“I promise.”

“Do you usually hit driver on this tee?”

“Always…with a good drive I can catch the downslope and end up with a short pitch to the green.”

“How often have you parred the hole?”

“About once out of every four times-it’s the easiest hole on the golf course. Any other questions?”

“No, I was just wondering…”

Dave scribbled some notes as Jonathan prepared to tee off.

Jonathan teed up the driver and let er rip! The ball flew down the left side of the fairway, drifted to the right, took a big bounce and trickled down the slope out of sight.

As they walked down the fairway Dave asked, “Is that good?”

Wearing a look of smug satisfaction, Jonathan proclaimed, “It should be perfect. With a bit of luck, the ball will be at the bottom of the hill.”

On reaching the apex of the hill, both players could see the ball lying just above the bottom of the slope on a steep downhill lie. Jonathan rolled his eyes, shook his head and sighed.

“Of all the dumb luck! Another three feet and I would have been right in front of the green!”

He snatched his sand wedge out of the bag, took one practice swing and tried to hit a high cut shot onto the green. The leading edge of the club hit the equator, skulled the ball over the green and down a steep bank. Cursing audibly, Jonathan hit a pitch shot back and two putts for a five.

“I can’t believe I bogeyed the easiest hole on the golf course – again!”

Jonathan flung his clubs over his shoulder and marched towards the second tee.

Dave had been standing behind the green scribbling some notes. By the time he glanced up, Jonathan was already pacing back and forth on the second tee.

The foursome in front had just teed off. Dave capped the Sharpie and ran to catch up. Panting as he pulled up on the second tee, Dave stopped to catch his breath.

“How much does your bag weigh?”

“About forty pounds I guess…why?”

“You practically ran to the tee. Do you always rush from one hole to the next?”

“I don’t know…never really thought about it”.

Dave flipped a page in the notebook and looked up inquiringly. “Could I ask why you consider the first hole to be the easiest?”

“What! I thought it was obvious. It’s the shortest hole on the golf course. Wide fairway, no bunkers…it should be a piece of cake.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but the green is very narrow from front to back so only a high, soft shot would hold the green.”

“So…”

“You know the course better than I do, but it seems to me that the best place to hit that shot would be off a level lie, between seventy-five to one-hundred yards out. It’s awfully difficult to hit a high lob from a downhill lie.”

“I guess. If only I’d hit a straight drive, I could have parred the hole. Now I have to try and make up for it. These guys are taking forever to putt out. “

“Just give him the putt”!

“Finally, they’re walking to the second tee. It’s about time!”

THE FIRST LESSON

How often have you played the same holes, week after week, year after year, in a state of déjà vu? Judging a hole as easy or hard has a huge effect.

When you learn to describe a hole objectively, like long or short (instead of easy or hard), then you unlock the potential to re-write the future instead of remaining trapped by the past. Every high handicap golfer can improve by evaluating a hole objectively instead of simply grabbing a Driver off the tee.

One simple method is playing the hole backwards (mentally of course) from Green to tee. This perspective reveals the most effective way to avoid the subtle pitfalls created by the golf course architect.

The first step to consistency is avoiding the hazards that lead to the dreaded “snowman”.

HOLE NUMBER TWO

“Of all the hazards, fear is the worst!”

Sam Snead

THE ILLUSION OF PERFECTION

The second hole is a one-hundred and sixty-five-yard par three. The pin is tucked behind a yawning bunker. Behind the green is the trademark steep slope that sets up a difficult uphill pitch.

“How are you going to play this hole?”

“I’m going for it...aiming right at the flag with my seven iron! I was hitting it solid on the range.”

“Isn’t that a tricky shot? You have to hit the ball absolutely perfect to carry the bunker and stop it close to the flag.”

“I just have to concentrate. Besides...I can’t believe I bogeyed the last hole!”

Jonathan grabbed his seven iron and took dead aim over the bunker. The ball flew with a perfect trajectory right over the trap and covered the flag.

“I couldn’t have hit the shot any better. That should be perfect!”

As they approach the green, the ball is nowhere to be seen. For one crazy moment Jonathan had visions of a hole-in-one. He peered into the hole. No luck. They circled the green from either side.

“This is crazy. That was a perfect shot! Look, here’s the ball mark three feet in front of the pin.”

Jonathan fixed the ball mark then looked up. Dave was standing on a mound at the back of the green. He extended an arm wraith-like and pointed down the slope. A patch of white peeped out among the thick underbrush at the base of the hill.

Jonathan grabbed his pitching wedge and lumbered down the hill, muttering audibly.

“What the hell! I hit a perfect shot and this is what happens. The green is too hard. That should have stopped within six feet of the cup.”

He slashed the ball out of the weeds with the first shot. The next shot landed on the green about twenty feet from the cup. Two putts for a five and the nearest section of unkempt grass suffered a severe haircut.

The indistinguishable imprecations continue along the pathway to the third tee. About halfway, Dave stopped abruptly.

“Excuse me Jonathan...”

“What is it?”

“I think your shoelace is untied.”

Jonathan stopped and plunked his bag down on the cart path. He bent over then hesitated.

“I’m not sure what you’re seeing, but the laces are still tight!”

“Sorry…my mistake, must have been a twig that you kicked.”

Jonathan snatched up his bag and sighed as they approached the third tee.

“Would you mind if I ask you something?”

“Don’t ask me what club I’m going to hit!”

“I was going to ask about your shoes. They look comfortable. Are they new?”

Jonathan’s eyes narrowed. His head tilted slightly, and he exhaled audibly.

“What do my shoes have to do with anything?”

“Oh nothing, I was just admiring them and wondered how they felt?”

“As a matter of fact, this is only the second time I’ve worn them. They’re a little stiff but they have good support. I wanted black and brown, but I would’ve had to wait for three weeks so they gave me a better price on the display pair of black and dark green.”

“They look great!”

A little calmer, Jonathan muttered a “thank you” and dropped his clubs down beside the third tee.

THE SECOND LESSSON

Perfect shots are not defined by results. Every golfer knows the effortless feeling of perfect contact. Re-creating this feeling is the raison d’etre for playing the game.

We feel perfectly justified in expecting good results when we make solid contact. When our expectations are based on events beyond our control, we become the victims in an ongoing game of mental ping-pong.

How often have you been upset over a perfectly struck shot that took a bad bounce? On the other hand, do you take it for granted when a poorly struck shot ends up with reasonable results?

Regardless of skill level, there is always a degree of luck involved in any shot.

It all depends on which Golf God you invoke.

HOLE NUMBER THREE

“Golf is a game of misses. Whoever misses the best is going to win.”

Ben Hogan

THE POWER OF MEMORY

The third hole is an uphill, five-hundred and twenty-five-yard par five. The right side of the fairway is bordered by majestic trees and out of bounds to within twenty yards of the green. Apart from a fairway bunker two-hundred and twenty-five yards off the tee, the left side is relatively open.

Jonathan automatically slips the headcover off his driver and flings it down behind him. Dave gives him a questioning glance.

“Well?”

“I think you know what I’m going to ask.”

Jonathan purses his lips and taps one foot impatiently.

“It’s a par five and I need to par this hole to salvage the round.”

“Have you ever shot par for nine holes?”

“No. My best score is forty-two. I shot it once last year, but only because I was Putting lights out. I’ve tried to figure out what I did but haven’t been able to come close again. Why?”

“What score would you be happy with today?”

“Well, low eighties would be great, but after the first two holes I’d be happy to break ninety.”

“Okay then. What if your goal for today was forty-five or better? That’s nine over par.”

“You got the math right...”

“At the moment you’re three over par...”

“After only two holes! Thanks for reminding me.”

Despite Jonathan’s lamenting, Dave remained calm.

“True enough...but you can bogey the next six holes and still shoot forty-five.”

“Yeah, so...”

“How did you play this hole last week?”

“I sliced a drive into the woods on the right and made seven. What does how I played last week have to do with today?”

“Actually, it has everything to do with it. If you’re playing for bogey, why are you hitting the Driver when the most vivid memory is slicing the tee shot out of bounds? Just wondering...”

Jonathan’s eyes became slits.

“You know...you can be really irritating at times...”

“So I’ve been told. Let’s go at this another way. What is five-hundred and twenty-five divided by four?”

“I think you mean by three. After all, it is a par five...”

“But what if you’re playing for six? Please humour me for a moment.”

“Yeah...yeah...ok. It’s one-hundred and thirty-two yards.”

“What club do you have the most confidence in?”

“My five wood. I usually hit it about one-hundred and seventy- five yards dead straight.”

“Why don’t you use it?”

“It seems like a cop-out. One of the fundamentals of the game is hitting the first shot as far as possible.”

“Really…I never read that in the rule book.”

Jonathan couldn’t think of a fitting response. All he wanted to do was play his game. Just to silence the third degree, he quickly addressed the ball and hit the five-wood.

The shot travelled down the left side of the fairway and faded into the centre about one-hundred and seventy-five yards out.

“There you go. If you’d hit that same shot with the driver, you probably would have ended up behind a tree or lost a ball out of bounds.”

The logic was undeniable - but in the game of golf, logic and emotion are distant cousins. Jonathan was still fuming inside. As they approached the ball, Dave flipped open his notebook.

“You have three shots to hit the ball three-hundred and fifty-five yards to the center of the green. That’s an average of one-hundred and eighteen-yards per shot. You pick the club.”

“You want me to hit each shot one-hundred and eighteen yards. That’s nuts!”

“Yes, that is nuts. I want you to hit whatever club you’re the most comfortable with, based on your most vivid memory of a similar situation.”

“Huh?”

“What club do you have good memories of hitting from the fairway?”

“Well…I can usually count on my five-iron for about one-hundred and sixty yards.”

“Good, except…”

Jonathan moaned.

“What now…you want me to bunt a nine iron all the way to the green?”

“Of course not, I was going to suggest you hit a number four hybrid.”

“But I usually have trouble getting under the ball with the hybrids.”

“You have an uphill lie. Just stay down and you’ll get the height. Take one practice swing, brush the grass and hit it.”

Jonathan addressed the ball and swung. He caught the ball a little thin but the uphill lie compensated. The ball took off like a bullet down the middle of the fairway. It came to rest about one-hundred and eighty-five yards from the green.

“Good shot!”

“Yeah, it ended up alright, but I didn’t hit it perfect.”

“If you’ve never shot par, then why are you upset with less than perfect? You’re confusing consistency with perfection. The first is possible, the second isn’t. How would you define consistency?”

“Well…I don’t know.”

“If you hit three fairways off the tee last week and four today, then you’re more consistent. If you lost two balls out of bounds last week and none today that’s more consistent. The definition of consistent is *constantly changing* based on how you feel.”

“I guess…”

“For the rest of today, let’s say that consistent means finishing with the same ball you started with. Does that make sense?”

“I suppose, but what about score?”

“Good question. Do you have the scorecard?”

Jonathan withdrew the card from his back pocket. The first two holes were outlined with a bold red circle, as if the scorecard were bleeding out.

“Thank you. You won’t be needing this today.”

Dave tore the card into four pieces and deposited them in a nearby garbage can.

“What the hell! How am I supposed to keep track of how much over par I am?”

“You’re not. Would you mind being a guinea pig for a new scoring system?”
“Don’t ask me to draw happy and sad faces beside each hole!”

“No worries. I want you to take this notebook and set up a rating system.”
He handed Jonathan a pocket coiled notebook with nine columns numbered from one to ten.

“I’ve seen this before. It’s like a points system based on par and bogey - right?”

“Not exactly. Results are secondary. It’s based on contact. In other words, a topped shot would be one. Hitting out of bounds would be three. A slice would be a five. A fade would be seven. Perfect contact would be a ten. The rest is up to you.”

“What’s the difference between this and keeping proper score?”

“Have you ever hit solid shots that end up poorly?”

“Well, sure….”

“You have no control over what happens to the ball after you hit it. There’s no point in getting upset over a shot that you’ve executed properly.”

“I guess…but it seems so subjective.”

“Compared to what? Have you ever hit a string of poor shots and you couldn’t figure out how to stop it?”
“Oh yeah!”

“Would you agree that your emotions affect your swing?”

“Well, of course.”

“Would you also agree that numbers don’t have emotions?”

“I knew that sooner or later this conversation would turn silly - of course not.”
“I want you to use the numbering system to keep your emotions in check - especially the feelings you have right after you hit a poor shot.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

“Let me ask you something. Do you find it easier to recall the poor shots or the good ones?”

Jonathan considers a moment, then responds.

“Well…I think about the poor ones more often. But it’s only because I’m trying to figure out what I did wrong.”

“Congratulations! You’ve just discovered the reason you and thousands of other golfers never show permanent improvement despite taking lessons and practicing diligently.”

“Great! What is it?”

“Have you ever heard the expression *you get what you focus on*?”
“Sure. It’s one of those psychobabble sayings that have nothing to do with reality.”
Dave looked at Jonathan sideways, then stood beside him and placed a hand on his shoulder. “To paraphrase that reclusive instructor from the Degoba system: “…*and that is why you fail*.”

Jonathan eyes closed tight then flicked open. As they approached his ball, he wondered what kind of crackpot would acknowledge a puppet as a source of wisdom.

They stopped at Jonathan’s ball.

“You have one-hundred and ninety yards to the middle of the green. The pin is dead center. No hazard in front. What club were you thinking of hitting?”

Jonathan was still trying to figure out the reference to Yoda.

“Uh…my four-iron. If I hit it perfect, I can land on the green.”

“And what if you mis-hit it?”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence. Whatever happened to positive thinking?”

“Positive thinking is overrated. We’ll talk about that later. Now, if you had to take two shots, what distance would you be most comfortable with for the second shot?”

“Well…I guess about seventy-five yards. Anything closer is less than a full swing.”

“Alright then, what club could you comfortably hit one-hundred and ten yards?”

“…a solid nine iron.”

Dave simply shrugged and motioned palms up. Jonathan made a hissing noise as his hand moved from the four-iron to a nine-iron. Muttering as he addressed the ball, he hit the nine iron solidly and left himself a seventy-yard pitch to the green.

Jonathan hit a pitching wedge to the center of the green and two putted for a six.

“Nice. That’s a good bogey.”

“Somehow it just doesn’t feel right. I could have made par. If only…”

Jonathan couldn’t finish the lament before a cold stare from Dave froze him in mid-sentence. They stopped halfway to the fourth hole.

“Well…are you going to write down your score?”

“Kind of difficult since you ripped up the scorecard.”

“Your score…remember. How well did you hit those shots?”

Jonathan rifled through his back pockets and withdrew the notebook. He fumbled for a pencil and finally, muttering to no one in particular, snatched one from his golf bag.

“The tee shot was a six.”

“A six! You are a masochist. It was a good shot that ended up in the middle of the fairway with an uphill lie. It was at least a seven!”

“How about the four-hybrid?”

“Well…I hit it pretty good….”

“Give it an eight. How about the third shot with your nine iron?”

“Solid. I couldn’t have hit it much better.”

“Okay then. Nine and a half. How about the wedge shot approach?

“It was pin-high, about twenty feet to the right.”

“Let’s say eight and a half. What about the putts?”

“I misread the first one a little. Maybe a seven.”

“But you left a gimmie for the second putt, so mission accomplished. Give it an eight. Congratulations. Your score for the hole was forty and a half out of a possible fifty. Not bad!”.

Jonathan looked at Dave sideways, trying to digest this weird numbering system.

Dave continued, “And you played the hole more consistently today than last week since you didn’t lose a ball.”

Jonathan was having a hard time wrapping his head around the idea of scoring higher. On the one hand he felt a sense of pride, but the old habit of comparing his score to perfection was a hard one to shake.

As they arrived on the fourth tee, Jonathan resumed the conversation about memory.

“So, what’s the point of this scoring system? You said something about trying to forget negative memories. But memories are permanent.”

“True enough. Unless you’re willing to undergo a lobotomy, you can’t eliminate memories, but you can learn how to control their effects.”

“Let me get this straight. Are you saying that the more I review my poor shots, the more likely I am to reproduce them?”

“Absolutely!”

“But I topped a drive two weeks ago and sliced one yesterday on the same hole, so that doesn’t make any sense.”

“Memories affect us in different ways. You may not reproduce the exact same results, but consistently reviewing a negative memory will have an effect in one form or another.”

Jonathan shook his head in response.

“Sounds kind of lame to me. Why can’t I just try to block out the bad memories?”

“Listen to what you just said. The harder you try to block them out, the stronger they become and the more potent their effects.”

“In a weird way, that kind of makes sense. But I still don’t see how this scoring system helps.”

“You agreed that numbers don’t have emotions. By immediately giving the shot a number, you remove the negative emotional attachment. The rating system will help you reduce the effects of the poor shot and move on. You only have six seconds to block the negative reaction before it becomes locked into your nervous system. It doesn’t take long for a poor shot to become a permanent memory.”

“What about the good shots? Don’t I want to remember them?”

“Of course. This scoring system will help with that as well. We’ll discuss that shortly, but from now on, I want you to immediately write down a number after each shot.”

THE THIRD LESSON

Perfection is an absolute-no shades of grey-all or nothing. It's a standard that's predefined and beyond your control. It's a laudable goal, but one that's impossible to achieve-except by accident.

Consistency is subjective; you make up the rules. When perfection is defined in terms of contact, then you are in control. Jonathan is beginning to see that perfect swings do not guarantee perfect results.

Emotion controls our memories and memories govern the access to our ability.

When asked which memories were more vivid, Jonathan replied that the poor shots seemed easier to replay in his mind's eye. Immediately after this realization, he tried to justify it with logic, explaining that he keeps recalling those memories in order to stop repeating the same mistakes.

Evaluating the shots numerically is one method of quickly eliminating, or at least reducing, the negative reaction to a poor shot. The act of stopping to consider a number immediately taps into your logical, rational brain.

Movements and emotions are inextricably linked; slow down your physical movements and your mind calms down. As we all know, emotions are cumulative–once a reaction starts, it builds quickly until it eventually explodes.

HOLE NUMBER FOUR

“Hit the shot you know you can hit,
not the one you think you should.”

Dr. Bob Rotella

A LESSON FROM QUANTUM PHYSICS

The fourth hole is a one-hundred and thirty-five-yard par three. The green slopes back to front and side to side, with a cavernous bunker on the right. Today the pin is dead center on a small knoll.

Jonathan takes out his eight iron and begins checking his swing while he waits for the group in front to clear the green.

“Why do you do that?”

“What?”

“Take a practice swing.”

“Well…to check my swing obviously. To make sure I don’t make the same mistake today that I made the last time I played this hole.”

“Do you really think a perfect practice swing has any relation to actually hitting the ball?”

“But I see the tour players do it all the time.”

“Of course, but even their practice swings aren’t the same as the real thing.”

“What’s your point?”

“Do you think of swing mechanics during your practice swing?"

“Of course, what else would I think about?”

“Just to continue our discussion, the more you focus on correcting swing faults, the more likely you are to repeat them in one form or another. It’s a variation of what I like to call the avoidance syndrome. Have you ever heard of the “*try not to think of pink elephants”* theory?”

“I don’t get it! What’s the point of taking a practice swing if not to correct my mistakes?”

“You want to review your memories of the good shots with the club you have in your hand. Use the practice swing to reinforce the good memories instead of reviewing your mistakes.”

Jonathan sighed in response. Dave flipped through his notebook and counted silently.

“In the last three holes, you’ve used the words “*should have*”, *“could have*” and “*would have*” fifteen times!”

“Okay…they’re just words. I hear golfers use them all the time.”

Dave’s eyes narrowed and glinted like steel flints. Instinctively, Jonathan backed up a few paces.

“Only mid to high handicap golfers use those phrases. They don’t understand the effects. You’ll never hear a low handicap player talk like that. They’re more than just words. To paraphrase Dr. Harlan Kilstein, those phrases are *confidence killers*. Every time you say one of them, it’s like admitting you’re not good enough.”

“Mmm…I never really thought about it.”

“You’re not the only one. Can you recall hearing other phrases with similar connotations?”

“Let’s see, how about something like *try not to go too far to the right*?”
“Good. Anything else?”

Jonathan stopped swinging.

“Oh…I hear this a lot. *Don’t forget about the water on the seventh hole*.”
“Now you’re on a roll. Interesting isn’t it? Have you ever heard the expression “*thoughts are things****?”***

“Not really. What the heck does that mean?”

“Basically, it means that your consistent thoughts affect your performance and the words you use affect your thoughts.”

“Now that you mention it, I heard a fellow that I was playing with last week say, *I’m going to **try** and carry the water on the twelfth hole with my second shot.”*

“Did he make the shot?”

“No. He bailed out at the last second and cold topped the ball into the water."

“Let me ask you. What are the odds of hitting a decent shot when those phrases are running through your mind?”

“Mmm...slim and none?

“You got it!”

“Hell… I might as well use sign language! You’ve just asked me to eliminate half my golfing vocabulary! How am I supposed to stop?”

The foursome in front had just cleared the Green.

“Let’s continue the discussion after you play this hole.”

Jonathan smacked an eight iron to the fringe. He chipped to within two feet and one putted for par. He was ecstatic!

“Alright! Now I can go for par on the next hole!”

“Well played. Sorry to be the voice of reason, but the goal for today is still bogey golf. How would you rate those three shots?”

“Well…they were all pretty good. I guess about an eight.”

“You’ve got it bad. They were all perfect. You made a natural par. Give yourself thirty!”

A reluctant smile stole across Jonathan’s face. Something was changing. For some inexplicable reason, he was beginning to feel a little better about his game. As they walked through a tree-lined canopy to the next tee, Dave interrupted Jonathan’s jovial mood.

“Have you ever heard of Albert Einstein?”

“Uh…sure. Quantum mechanics and riding light beams. Pretty high-brow stuff. What does he have to do with golf?”

“Einstein’s definition of insanity applies perfectly to golf. You’ve probably heard it, or at least a variation of it. Essentially, he said that we will keep doing the same things over and over ad infinitum even when they don’t work. Does that sound like anyone you know?”

Jonathan shrugged and thought to himself,

'Up to this point, most of this mental stuff was making sense. But what the hell does quantum mechanics have to do with my game? Quantum mechanics is related to golf as much as tennis is to Chinese checkers. What I really want is some time to concentrate on the angle of my left wrist at the top of the backswing.'

"If you're trying to confuse me, it's working beautifully…"

"By now you're probably wondering why you allowed me to join you today. Yes?"

"Well…the thought had crossed my mind."

"You've recovered from the poor start and you're on track to shoot forty-five or better, but I can tell that something just doesn't feel right. Am I close?"

"I have to be honest with you. I was really pissed when my partners bailed on me, so I agreed to letting you join me to prove you were a fraud."

"Thanks for sharing. How do you feel so far?"

"Well, you have shown me a few things that could make a difference."

"And none of it about changing your technique."

“True. What’s the deal with Einstein? I still don’t see how it relates.”

“We all have behaviour patterns that govern our lives. Some work, some don’t. The interesting thing is that we tend to keep repeating the patterns automatically, even when they aren’t working. When the pattern is interrupted, it disturbs our sense of balance. That’s why you’ve been irritated since we started.”

Jonathan nodded in silent agreement.

“I’ve thrown a wrench into your unconscious patterns. It’s just that you weren’t aware of them until I started asking you all these questions.”

“I have to admit, that up until the last hole you *were* getting under my skin.”

Dave is preoccupied writing notes as he walks while Jonathan strides confidently ahead. Suddenly, Jonathan stops abruptly. Only the clanking of Jonathan’s irons prevents Dave from crashing headlong.

“Wait a second! Are you saying that my golf game is just a habit?”

“Just a habit sounds trivial. Habits are powerful. But to answer your question, yes, your golf game is a by-product of habitual ways of thinking and acting. Since our nervous systems likes to run on autopilot, anything that disturbs an ingrained habit will meet with resistance. You have to find the right strategy in order to introduce some new patterns.”

They arrived on the next tee just as the group ahead finished playing their second shots. Dave pulled up a seat on the bench beside the ball washer and popped open a water bottle. Meanwhile, Jonathan laid his bag down and started fumbling through the abyss of endless pockets.

A satisfied exclamation and, glancing sideways in Dave's direction, Jonathan held a cell phone up to his ear.

"I just want to make a quick call. You have a seat on the bench and relax. The nice men in the "white suits" will be here in twenty minutes."

Jonathan pretends to dial and glances askance at Dave.

"You can even ride in the front seat of the car. It's only a short ride to a secluded summer retreat where you can have a nice long chat with Albert Einstein."

Dave looked up with a wry expression.

"Very funny. The point is, that our day-to-day existence is governed by habits. Most of the time we're not consciously aware of them until they're interrupted."

"And this relates to my game how?"

"The most common habit among mid to high handicap golfers is automatically looking for swing faults after every poor shot."

“Are you saying that technical mistakes aren’t responsible?”

“Not at all. What I *am* saying, is that one poor shot isn’t the result of a critical swing flaw. If you hit a good drive and follow it up with a poor iron, you haven’t suddenly developed some mysterious technical ailment.”

Jonathan sighed in response, “I give up. Care to explain?”

“The poor shot is the result of a disagreement between your conscious and unconscious minds.”

“This is what I was afraid of…head in the clouds psychobabble. What are you talking about?”

“Let’s say you have a one-hundred and seventy-five yard shot over water. Your conscious mind says you should be able to hit a five iron, but you can’t stop replaying the memory of hitting into the water the last time you played the shot. That’s the unconscious mind reminding you of your past mistake, in a well-intentioned attempt to stop you from repeating it.”

“Who wins?”

“That all depends.”

“On what…?”

“If you can quickly interrupt the negative memory and replace it with a positive one, then you have a decent chance of hitting the shot.”

“And if I can’t stop thinking about the water?”

“You get what you focus on…remember?”

“As much as I hate to admit it, this mental stuff is actually sounding reasonable. You’re saying that every poor shot is the result of replaying negative memories?

“Assuming you have solid fundamentals. Yes.”

Jonathan slips the phone into the side pocket of his bag.

“I don’t know. It sounds too simple. Believe me, I know from experience that the golf swing is far more complicated than just controlling memories.”

The Fourth Lesson

Whew! Jonathan went through quite the psychoanalysis in this chapter.

Have you ever heard that you *should try* and forget the poor shots and just stay in the present? You already have some mental tools for controlling the effects of poor shots, but how does your language affect your mental state?

The three phrases that were evident in this chapter (can you recall them?) all contribute to keeping your mind remaining stuck in the past.

This habit leads to the state of mind I call the *avoidance mode*. Your conscious mind is looking at the target, but your unconscious mind is firing off the warning bells about potential hazards.

In the next chapter, you'll see how Jonathan develops some simple techniques for staying in the present.

HOLE NUMBER FIVE

“The Mind messes up more shots than the body.”

(Terrible) Tommy Bolt

MEMORIES ARE MALLEABLE

The fifth hole is a three-hundred and sixty-four-yard par four, dogleg right. The pin is tucked behind a copse of trees. It's crucial that the tee shot is long enough to have a good approach angle.

Jonathan automatically grabs his driver.

"This is a short hole. If I can hit a good drive, then maybe I'll have a mid-iron left."

Dave gives Jonathan *the look.*

"What…? You're not going to suggest I hit an iron?"

"I want you to stand on the tee and wait for a moment. Now look down the fairway and tell me where you want the tee shot to end up."

Jonathan gazes down the fairway and picks a spot fifteen yards left of the one-hundred and fifty-yard marker.

"Well…I guess about two-hundred and thirty-yards out would be perfect."

“You’re thinking in terms of par. Remember, you’re playing for bogey. The hole isn’t very long. The priority is having a good angle into the Green.”

“Yeah...yeah.”

“What club do you feel confident of hitting that will leave you two clear shots to the green?”

“Well...I guess a three hybrid.”

Jonathan hit the three-hybrid with a slight fade which worked out perfectly. He had one-hundred and ninety-four yards left to the green.

"Now, look at the Green and pick a spot in the fairway that would give you a good approach for the third shot. What distance do you feel most confident of to hit the ball close?”

“But I can reach the green with a perfect three wood!”

“The green is bordered by sand and the opening is only ten yards wide. Why put all that pressure on yourself? Now, what distance would you feel most confident for a third shot?”

“I guess thirty yards or less.”

“Alright then, you’ve got a good lie. Hit your five Wood.”

Jonathan hit the five Wood well and left himself twenty-three yards to the green with a perfect angle to the flag. The pitch shot was twelve feet below the hole. His par putt lipped out.

“Well done. How would you rate each shot?”

Jonathan was finding the process of evaluating the shots much easier.

“You know something, I’m starting to see that I hit more decent shots than poor ones. Let’s see…the tee shot would be a seven. The five Wood, a seven-and-a-half and the pitch shot an eight. I just lipped out the putt, so I guess an eight and a half.”

“A total of thirty-one out of a possible forty. Not bad!”

“It’s kind of funny, but I do feel a little better about my game. Are you implying that I can improve my game just by taking control of my memories?”

“I’m not saying that you’ll magically transform into a scratch golfer overnight, but you are starting to train your nervous system to evaluate the shots by degrees instead of just accepting the default system.”

“Which is?”

“Either perfect or bad; pretty tough standard wouldn’t you say?”
Jonathan simply nodded in silence.

“Let me ask you something. Have you ever hit a perfect shot?”

“Of course. Every golfer has. I’m sure that I could shoot in the seventies if I could figure out how to repeat them.”

“Can you recall what did you right after you hit that perfect shot?”
“I’m not sure I follow…”

“I’ll bet you tried to figure out what you did with your swing, like shift your weight faster or delay the wrist cock or supinate the left wrist. Am I right?”

“Of course! How else am I going to be able to repeat it?”

“And were you able to figure it out?”

“For a little while I could hang onto the feeling, but after a few days it disappeared so I just gave up and went back to my old swing.”

“Instead of analyzing your swing, did you ever consider the ritual you followed *before* hitting the shot?”

Jonathan rose in silence and walked to the ball washer. He grabbed the plunger and cleaned the ball within an inch of its life.

“I’ve heard there’s a fine line between sanity and insanity.”

Jonathan began meticulously polishing every dimple, paused momentarily and glanced sideways at Dave.

“I think you’ve just crossed it!”

“Stay with me for a moment. Would you agree that the less thinking you do, the better?”

“Of course. But how can you stop thinking?”

“Good question. What if every swing was part of a chain of events; like a ritual you perform over and over – most of the time by rote. Do you usually go for a morning coffee?”

“Sure. I hit the Starbucks drive-through on the way to work. Why?”

“I’m sure you’ve heard that coffee makes you tense.”

“Of course. I should probably cut back but…”

“Have you ever considered that it’s not the coffee that’s making you tense but rather the events preceding the coffee?”

Jonathan raised his eyebrows then glanced at his watch. “Okay…you have twenty seconds before I make *the call*.”

“Do you ever run late in the morning?”

“Only most of the time.”

“So you’re already a little tense when you leave the house. You probably listen to the traffic reports to figure out the best way to circumvent the rush hour traffic. Does that sound about right?”

“Keep going.”

“By the time you reach Starbucks, the line-up is six cars deep. You creep up to the microphone, softly cursing inconsiderate people who order six double tall, caramel macchiatos and three breakfast sandwiches, and you order a single shot espresso. All you can do is check e-mail and text messages, hoping you’re not going to be late for the first appointment. Does this sound familiar?”

“Kind of…”

“So, let me ask you…is it the coffee that’s making you tense or the events leading up to it?”

“Are you saying that caffeine isn’t a stimulant?
”
“Not at all…I’m just saying that it exacerbates the residual tension but it’s not responsible for creating it.”

“That kind of makes sense. So how does it apply to my game?”

“Your swing is a link in an infinite chain. In order to effect permanent changes, you want to alter the links in the chain of events leading up to hitting the ball. Kind of like a recipe if you will...”

“You do realize that you’re comparing a golf swing, one of the most complex movements in sport, to baking a cake?”
“Absolutely!”

Jonathan adjusted his cap then rubbed his left hand over his face. He glanced up, hoping to tee off before the group behind caught up and got wind of this conversation.

The foursome in front was still in range.

“Okay, I’ll play along. Just what do you mean? I already have a pre-shot routine.”

“That’s the last link in the chain. It’s what you do in-between shots that will determine your swing and ultimately the outcome.”

Dave flipped open the notebook and began to recite point by point.

“Want to hear your typical behaviour pattern after you hit a poor shot?”

Jonathan winces and shrugs. “Not particularly…”

Dave simply smiles then continues.

“You sigh, look skyward then shake your head. As you walk up to the ball, you’re muttering to yourself. Your pace quickens as you get closer.”

“I’m not following…”

“The faster you walk, the more tense you become. As you approach the ball, you start replaying the image of poor results. You can take it from there.”

“Geez…I feel like a bug under a microscope. Finally, those guys are out of range!”

THE FIFTH LESSON

Poor Jonathan!

It looks like the last tenuous thread to his unconscious beliefs have been severed. He still desperately clings to the idea that changing the angle of his left wrist will be the key to consistency.

Have you ever hit a perfect shot? Of course, you have. The frustrating part is the unpredictability. If you can do it once, then you should be able to do it again. As Jonathan is beginning to realize, it's not what you *did* that produced that shot – it's how you *felt before* hitting the shot.

Instead of searching for the answer in terms of swing mechanics, you need to go back to the time just before that last perfect shot and trace your behaviour pattern.

Obviously, that's easier said than done.

Start by *acting as if* you know what you did (I know this sounds weird) and the answers will begin to appear.

In chapter six, Jonathan sees how he can use the past to re-create his best shots more often.

HOLE NUMBER SIX

“Good golf is habit forming.”

Dave Johnston

SHORT-CIRCUITING THE PAST

The sixth hole is a straightaway, three-hundred and seventy-six-yard par four. The green is elevated twenty feet above the fairway. The pin is tucked in the right corner behind a large mound.

Jonathan automatically reaches for the driver then hesitates and withdraws a three Wood. He takes Dave's silence as approval. Jonathan hits the shot one-hundred and eighty-five yards down the middle. He has one-hundred and ninety-one yards to the pin.

As they approach Jonathan's ball, the conversation resumes.

"That pin is in a nasty spot. The greenskeeper must have had a fight with his wife."

"I know what you're doing. You're suggesting that I shoot for the middle of the green."

"That's one option. Here's another one. Would you rather have a forty-foot chip or a thirty-foot putt?"

"What?"

“The pin is on a slight downslope. How do you feel? Would you have a better chance of lagging a putt close or chipping?”

“Mmm…I think I have more confidence in chipping. Are you saying I should layup?”

“Whatever you’re most comfortable with. Stop for a moment and see which shot feels right.”

“I’d prefer to chip if I knew how to put backspin on the ball.”

“Do you know actually what backspin is?”

“Of course. The ball is travelling forward and spinning backward. Whenever I try and do it, I end up skulling the ball over the green.”

“You do realize that chipping is the only part of the game that can save shots. Let’s see if we can improve your technique. Are you game?”

“I guess…can’t be much worse.”

“What are the three keys for imparting backspin?”

“Well…I want the ball to roll up the grooves on the clubface.
”
“Number one…”

“Contact the ball on the downswing.”

“Number Two...”

“Make sure the clubface follows through to the hole.”

Dave emits a buzzing noise reminiscent of a game-show host.

“Close...but no cigar.”

Momentarily taken aback, Jonathan stares unblinkingly,

“But I’ve always been told to follow-through. It’s one of the ten commandments!”

“For ninety-five percent of the shots, yes, but chipping is different.”

“How so?

“With most shots you want maximum distance. With chipping, the backspin counteracts the forward momentum. It’s not uncommon for students to cut off the follow-through with a full swing and try to extend it with the chip shots. It’s the exact opposite.”

“I never looked at it that way…”

In response, Dave simply tapped his temple.

“But I still don’t see how cutting off the follow-through imparts backspin?”
“The longer the ball is pressed against the grooves, the greater the backspin. Make sense?”

“Sure.”

“So, the longer the clubhead is at ground level…”

“The more the ball is compressed. I get it!”

Jonathan considers momentarily then responds.

“But how do I know exactly where to cut off the follow-through?”

“Imagine the clubhead stops level with your front foot. Past that point it naturally begins to swing upward.”

“Mmm…who knew?”

“Now you do. Just keep in mind that it will take a little practice to develop a feel for the technique.”

“Let me see if I’m following. Backspin is a result of contacting the ball with a descending blow and compressing it against the grooves.”

“Exactly…”

“So how do I change the set-up?”

“Keep your hands opposite your left leg like a normal iron, play the ball closer to your right foot so the shaft is in line with your left arm and stop the follow-through when the clubhead is at ground level.”

“Would it be easier to do that when my weight favours my left foot at address?”

“Absolutely!”

“Okay then. This should help a lot. Thanks.”

“No worries. Let’s move on before the group behind starts firing balls over our head.”

Jonathan considered a moment, then grabbed his six-iron. The ball came to rest on the fringe of the green with a perfect line to the cup. His chip and run shot stopped four feet away. No, he didn’t make the putt. But he did make a solid five.”

“Did you see that? The ball skipped a little. It had backspin!”

“Well done. You’re learning to access your feelings. How did you score?”

“The three-wood was a seven-and-a-half. The six iron was an eight. The pitch was a nine, the first putt was an eight. He jots down the numbers and totals them. Thirty-two and a half out of forty - not bad I guess.”

“Absolutely! You were asking me earlier about locking in the good shots. How do you feel about the scoring system now?”

“Well…I haven’t lost any balls since we started, and I do feel a little better about the good shots…even though they weren’t perfect.”

“Let’s get this notion of perfection out of the way forever. How would you define perfection?”

“Uh…I don’t know. It’s just a feeling.”

“How about this? When you make solid contact and the ball travels on your intended line, then it was perfect.”

“Sounds simple enough. I get the idea of reducing the effects of past failures and amplifying the success, but I don’t see Tour players flipping through their notebooks and writing down how well they hit particular shots.”

“Really? You think those little books are only for yardage? They keep track of everything. It’s one way of keeping their mind focused in the present.”

As they walk down the path to the seventh tee, Jonathan’s pace slows considerably. Dave hesitates momentarily, then asks the question which had been floating around in the back of Jonathan’s head since the third hole.

“Let me guess… you’re wondering how long you have to keep following this weird scoring system?”

“Well…the guys are gonna think I’ve cracked up when they find out.”
“You just let them keep comparing their scores to par. They’ll come around soon enough when you start winning the bets.”
“Maybe. But that really doesn’t answer my question.”
“Here’s the deal. When you can eliminate the effects of a poor shot instantly, so it doesn’t affect the next shot, then you can toss the book. How’s that?”
“That sounds fair. Surely, there must be other ways of interrupting the poor memories?”
“Good choice of words. That’s exactly what you’re doing, interrupting the replay - kind of like breaking a closed circuit.”

“I hadn’t really thought of it in those terms. I guess it is like an endless loop and the poor shot is the switch.”

“Very good.”

“Well…how do I cut the power?”

“How often do you watch golf on television?

“The odd time I’ll watch Morning Drive…only for the tournament summaries of course…the bombshell women have nothing to with it.”

Jonathan purses his lips in a mock whistle and waves his hand rapidly.

“Of course not. I was referring to the tournaments.”

“I knew that. Yeah, I watch every weekend.”

“Besides driving the ball crazy distances, do you notice anything every player has in common?”

“Well…they’re all different, so not really.”

“Have you ever noticed some of the players doing anything unusual before or after every shot?”

“Mmm….just some nervous twitches. Phil twirls the clubhead just before he starts. Come to think of it…so does Keegan Bradley.”

“Very good. Anything else come to mind?”

“Jim Furyk hitches his pants in a weird way, Brandt Snedeker taps the ground, a number of players tug on their shirtsleeve.”

“Now you’re on a roll. Ever wonder why they do those actions every single time?”

“Nerves I guess.”

“That’s a small part of it. Even the Tour pros doubt themselves from time to time, which figures since they’re playing for millions of dollars. At that level, they need a way to make sure that only positive memories are replaying as they address the ball.”

“Are you saying those movements are deliberate?”

“Any action you see a player repeat consistently is deliberate.”

“I never paid any attention to them. Who knew?”

“Do you ever watch tennis?”

“Only the women - love to watch Maria Sharapova!”

“That figures. Okay then. Have you noticed any peculiar ritual some of the players follow when they’re getting ready to return a serve?”

“Well. A lot of players turn around momentarily. Now that you mention it, I’ve seen some players tap their leg twice. Is that what you mean?”

“Exactly! How about baseball? Do you ever notice how the best batters do the same things every time? They might tap the plate twice, tug on their cap and wave the club. That’s the ritual that worked in the past, so they try to replicate it as much as possible.”

“Whoa! So, if I just figure out what I did to hit a good shot, then I can reproduce it every time?”

“Not quite…if it were that simple, you’d be on the Tour and I’d be living on my own island. Even the best batters only hit safely a third of the time. Discovering the ritual is the first key to consistency.
”

“What about positive thinking?”

“How would you define positive thinking?”

“I guess it’s pretending a problem doesn’t exist - basically trying to ignore it.”
“What do you think happens when you keep repeating to yourself, ‘*there is no water*?’

“Wait a minute! I know where this is going. It’s reinforcing the image of the water.”

“Bingo! Most of us have been conditioned to think negatively even when
we’re trying to be positive.”

“Yikes! That’s crazy!”

As they arrive on the seventh tee, the group ahead is just emerging from the trees two-hundred yards down the fairway. Dave stands to one side scribbling some notes. Jonathan sits down on the bench beside the ball-washer. While he waits for the foursome ahead to clear, he rubs his eyes with the heels of his hands.

“You know something. Even though I still think you’re a little wacko, this mental stuff is helping to explain a lot of questions I’ve had over the years.”

The Sixth Lesson

Now that's interesting!

It appears that all the innocuous habits that you see low handicap players repeat, are unique keys for slipping into *the zone.* The concept of positive thinking took quite a beating in this chapter. You can pretend that the water isn't there, but denial is a harbinger of disaster.

Jonathan already learned about the avoidance mode. Positive thinking is simply a matter of learning to control your focus. It's a skill that can be developed with practice. The trick is controlling it without force.

On the next hole, Jonathan takes his game to a whole new level.

HOLE NUMBER SEVEN

“Students must be encouraged to trust in their own capacity to learn from experience.; to have faith in what they see, hear and feel.”

Mike Hebron

THE POWER OF NEGATIVE THINKING

The seventh hole is a one-hundred and ninety-nine-yard par three, with a large green tiered from front to back and guarded by a wide, shallow trap. The pin is perched precariously on the top level about fifteen feet from the back edge. The trademark slope behind the green is invisible from the fairway.

The foursome in front had just cleared the hole. Sand residue on the green was telltale of an epic battle.

“So, what’s the game plan?”

“Well…if I hit a four iron, I might be able to carry the bunker and hold the lower tier.”

“And…”

“I would have a sixty-foot right to left uphill putt. For sure, I don’t want to go past the cup and have a four-foot downhill putt coming back.”

“Go on…”

“I think I’ll try and hit a three-quarter three-iron and hope it holds the green.”

Yes?”

Jonathan’s enthusiastic plan quickly dissolved in response to a stare from Dave that could burn holes through brick. Jonathan instinctively swallowed as if he could feel the heat.

“Listen to what you just said. What does that sound like to you?”
“Uh…well, not too positive. Kind of like avoidance mode?”

Dave simply nodded in reply.

“You have to be aware of the words you use. *Try, don’t* and *but* are mental daggers. Now tell me the shot that you feel confident you can hit.”
Jonathan considered for a moment.

“Well…I’m not great out of the traps, so for now I’m probably better to lay up short and pitch on. The trap is about ten yards in front of the green. I can hit a soft five iron and lay up.”

Dave was busy jotting notes. Jonathan took his silence as an affirmation.
“Remember, you’re playing for bogey.”

“I guess I always want to go for the flag. I’m more confident now with my chipping, so here goes.”

Jonathan hit a five iron about ten yards short of the trap, leaving a straightforward uphill chip and run. The ball bounced up to the cup and (since he’s finally starting to listen) he chipped in for a two!

“Well done!”

“Thanks.”

“You don’t seem terribly excited. You just made a legitimate birdie.”
“Yeah, but I didn’t hit the green in regulation.”

“God…you *are* a tough nut to crack! You’ve got to start getting excited when you make good shots. You spend so much time rehashing the poor shots and taking the good shots for granted. Let’s do something to lock in the feeling of that chip shot.”

“Like…?”

“Twirl the club. Tap your leg. Tip your cap. Whistle a tune…”

“Like this. I’ve seen Phil do this…” (Jonathan twirls the clubhead).

“Wonderful. If you weren’t right-handed, two inches shorter and ten pounds lighter, you’d be a dead ringer for Phil. Step back for a moment and close your eyes. Twirl the club and recall the feeling of watching the ball drop into the hole.”

THE SEVENTH LESSON

Now there’s a new wrinkle!

Most of us watch the pros on television and try to copy their swing (or at least elements of it). Instead, we should be watching the little movements they repeat consistently *before* they address the ball.

The idea isn’t to copy them exactly, but to find the recipe that produces the best results for you.

Mentally replaying your best shots regularly and linking them to an action that works for you is the “secret” to using your memories instead of letting your memories use you.

HOLE NUMBER EIGHT

“Tell me, I forget, Show me, I remember,
Involve me, I will understand.”

Confucius

THE CRUCIBLE

The eighth hole is a short, three-hundred and seventy-six-yard par four with a sharp dogleg left. There is a creek twenty yards in front of the green. The ideal tee shot would be two-hundred and twenty-five yards to the right of centre.

Having birdied the last hole, Jonathan is full of confidence. He tees up a three wood, takes one look down the fairway and cold tops the ball onto the forward tee. Jonathan slams the three wood into the bag sending the headcover plummeting to the ground. He curses softly and marches down the fairway.

“I knew it! All this mental mumbo-jumbo doesn’t work. I haven’t hit a shot like that in years - and I was just trying to layup!”

Dave snatches up the headcover and jogs to catch up.

“Hold on. You forgot your headcover!”

Jonathan stops and waves his arms in frustration as Dave hands him the cover.

“Thanks...of all the stupid!”

“Hang on a minute. Can I ask you something?”

“I guess. “

“What were you thinking as you addressed the ball?

“Nothing…”

“It’s impossible to think of nothing. Just stop for a moment and think back. What was running through your mind?”

Jonathan closes his eyes and calms down. Dave helps to jog his memory.
“Here’s what *I* saw. You stood over the ball and just swung. No club twirling or leg tapping – just step up and whack it.”

“I thought the idea was to stop thinking, so I tried to take as little time as possible.”

“That makes sense in theory, but rushing isn’t the answer.”

“What am I supposed to do? If I stand over the ball too long, I can’t help thinking about my swing.”

“First, slow down. Take deliberate steps. While you’re walking between shots, start replaying the memories of success with the club you’ll need for the next shot. Once you’re over the ball you need a trigger.”

“A what?”

Dave rests a hand gently on Jonathan’s shoulder. Reflexively, his shoulders drop and his whole body relaxes.

“Did you ever see Jack Nicklaus play in his prime?”

“Of course. “

“Did you ever notice how long he stood over the ball before he started his swing?’

“Sure. If I’m not mistaken, he was penalized several times...”

“Absolutely. Yet he never varied that routine. Do you know what he was doing as he stood there?”

“Well....waiting until he was ready, I guess.”

“Exactly. And what does *ready* mean?”

“Well...uh...I don’t know.”

“He wouldn’t start his swing until he could visualize a successful shot.”
“But I’m not good at visualizing. He hit more practice balls in a week that I hit in five years. I don’t have the time or money to practice like that. I’m already building an addition onto the doghouse for playing every day next weekend!”

“Let me ask you something. How long have you been driving?”

”What?”

Dave motions as if holding a steering wheel.

“Driving…you know…a car.”

“Well…I guess about twenty-two years. Why?”

“Can you *see* your destination before you start?”

”If it’s somewhere I travel regularly. Sure.”

“How long have you been a member at Cedarbrae?”

“This is the fifth year. Why?”

“And how many rounds would you say you’ve played?”

“Well…twice a week, so about three-hundred and twenty games, I guess. What are you getting at?”

“Would you say that you know the golf course like the back of your hand.”

“I suppose…”

“So, with a little practice, you *could* picture every hole in your mind. Welcome to the process of visualization.”

“I thought visualization was being able to picture every detail of the shot?”

“The more you rehearse, with or *without a ball*, the more detail you’ll see. The real goal is to get the *feeling* that you’ve already hit the shot before you start your swing.”

Jonathan raised his eyebrows and twirled a forefinger with a circular motion.

“I think someone must have filled your water bottle with ball washer fluid. How can I pretend that I’ve already hit the shot?”

“But when you hit a poor shot, haven’t you already pre-programmed the results?”

“Are you saying that I imagined myself hitting a poor shot? That’s ridiculous!”

“I’m not saying you imagined a poor shot. What I *am* saying, is that you didn’t have a clear idea of a successful outcome.”

“Mmm...how do you explain topping the tee shot when I was trying to lay up?”

“You took the three wood to layup, but you didn’t have a clear image of where you wanted to hit the ball. You kept looking up towards the trees at the corner of the dogleg, the exact place you didn’t want to go, and you avoided them perfectly.”

“Sounds fishy to me but I’m come this far. How do I make up for it?”

“First, stop saying “*make up for it*.” Be aware of using phrases that keep you stuck in the past. You can still make a bogey on this hole. Tell me where you want to hit this shot, so you’ll have a good angle for the approach.”

“I hit the tee shot about one-hundred yards, so I have two-hundred and fifty yards to the green. The water is twenty yards in front, so I would have to carry a shot over two-hundred and thirty yards to make the green.”

“Earlier you said that you had the most confidence from about fifty to seventy-five yards out. What two shots would leave you with that distance?”

“Two shots?”

“The goal is to play to your strengths. If you’re going to take two shots, then make it two shots that leave you a comfortable approach.”

“I guess a solid seven iron would leave me about a seventy-yard pitch shot.”

“Okay then.”

Jonathan sullenly takes the seven iron out of his bag and approaches the ball.

“As you get ready to hit, I want you tell me exactly where you want this shot to end up. Talk me through the shot as if you were an announcer.”

“Out loud?”

“Humour me...”

Jonathan makes a funny face then holds an imaginary microphone and does his best Jim Nantz impression.

“It looks like Jonathan has a seven iron. Yes, that’s the club. Interesting approach. His plan is to hit the shot about one-hundred and fifty yards to the right center of the fairway so that he has a good angle for the second shot. The pin is at the back of the green.”

“Wonderful. You could be a stand-in. Now, how about the target?”

“Target? But this is just a layup shot.”

“You need to have a specific target – remember?”

“Okay…okay. A perfect line would be the third evergreen tree on the right with the crooked branch.”

“Alright…now start twirling the club and looking at the tree. As you get ready, start acting as if you’ve already hit the shot.”

Jonathan hit the seven-iron solid with a slight fade. It ended up in a reasonable position about sixty-five yards from the green.

A decent pitch left him a thirty-foot uphill putt. His first putt was five feet short. He managed to catch the edge of the cup and make the second putt. As soon as he finished the hole, Jonathan started lamenting about how the poor tee shot had cost him a bogey.

“The tee shot didn’t cost you a stroke.”

“But I bogeyed a really short hole!”

“You only hit one poor shot. Contact is the only criteria. You mis-read the first putt but you didn’t mis-hit it. How would you score the hole?”

“The tee shot sucked, so I give it a three.”

“Fair enough, how about the rest of the shots?”

“The second shot would be a seven and the third would be an eight. The first putt was okay. I guess a seven. I barely made the second putt, so I give it a five”

“You’re not hearing me. Two putts *is* the goal. It doesn’t matter whether it went in the front, back or side door. Give it a seven. Even though you bogeyed the hole, your score was still thirty-two out of forty.”

“Funny, when you say it that way, it doesn’t sound so bad.”

Dave simply tapped his temple in response as they headed for the ninth hole.

THE EIGHTH LESSON

Are you still there?

Jonathan discovered that every shot requires a specific target in order to focus on a positive result. The human nervous system operates on a principle of black or white, good or bad, right or wrong – there are no shades of grey.

What does that mean?

How often have you addressed a shot and just tried to hit the ball down the *middle* of the fairway? The middle is not a target. When you don't have a specific target, your unconscious mind takes over and automatically slips into avoidance mode.

As Jonathan discovered, visualization is a feeling. All of us have hit shots that we knew were going to be good before we even made contact. Everything just felt *right.*

Obviously, this feeling is different for everyone. The pace of your stride, the words you use and your physiology all affect how you feel.

The *feeling* is not subject to the whims of the golf gods. You control your feelings. The trick is discovering the recipe you need to create the feeling consistently. Awareness is the key.

HOLE NUMBER NINE

“It’s not enough to study action under a microscope,
you need to know what it feels like.”

Roger Fisher

TURNING THE CORNER

The last hole is a three-hundred and ninety-two-yard par four, dogleg right with a fairway bunker at the right corner about two-hundred yards off the tee. The left side of the fairway is tree lined to within one-hundred yards of the Green.

“So, how are you going to play this hole?”

“Well, I want to stay to the left of center off the tee. Maybe I’ll try to hit a soft draw.”

“When was the last time you hit a soft draw?”

Jonathan shrugged.

“Right then. Work with your memories. What’s the most vivid memory you have of this hole?”

“Aiming down the left side and slicing the tee shot out of bounds.”

“Alright then…take your three-wood, aim at the corner of the trees and make your normal swing.”

”I’m afraid I’ll slice it …”

“Exactly. With the fairway wood, the slice will be more of a fade. It won’t reach the trap after it lands.”

Jonathan shakes his head in mock despair.

“Okay. I’m lost. For the past hour and a half, you’ve been showing me how to forget the bad shots and focus on the good ones. Now you want me to deliberately hit a *slice?”*

“You’re not *trying* to hit a slice. You’re just working with your most vivid memory of this hole. What are the odds of hitting a draw when you automatically start replaying the memory of a slice under pressure?”

“Well…”

“You do realize that all the Pros have a *go to* shot. Bubba Watson fades the Drive. Jim Furyk draws it. Some are low ball hitters. Some are high ball hitters. You have to discover the shot that you can rely on in crucial situations.”

“But I’m not playing for a million dollars!”

“No – you’re playing for control of your mind.”

“Mmm…Okay I guess.”

Jonathan plucked the three wood and started rhythmically twirling the club. He gently placed the clubhead behind the ball, aimed at a lone birch tree down the left side, slowly exhaled and swung. The ball flew straight as a bullet directly at the tree.

Jonathan held his breath as the ball tracked on a line deep into the forest. True to form, about fifteen yards short of the tree line, his natural left to right curve took over and the ball ended up in the right center of the fairway.

“Whew! I was a little worried there for a moment. “

“That fade is your *go to* shot. As long as you don’t fight it, the ball will curve gently from left to right every time. You have about two-hundred and twenty-five yards to the green. What’s the plan?”

“What do I have to shoot to break forty-five?”

“Just focus on hitting the shot you feel most comfortable with. Remember, the goal is perfect contact.”

Jonathan shrugged.

“Fine…”

“You’ve hit your best approach shots today from about fifty yards, so what club can you hit about one-hundred and seventy-five yards?”

“A good four hybrid.”

“Do it!”

Jonathan started twirling the hybrid and picked a level spot about fifty-five yards from the green as the target. The ball came to rest sixty-five yards out in a direct line with the flag. A good pitch left him a ten-foot putt. He lipped out and settled for an easy bogey.

“Well…how do you feel?”

“Not half bad. I’d feel better if you told me my score.”

Dave whipped out a pocket calculator and started totalling the figures. “Okay then. You scored three-hundred and twenty out of a possible four-hundred and ten. Pretty good, I’d say.”

“What…! That’s not what I meant. That’s just silly. I mean what was my *real* score?”

“Let me ask you something. Do you feel better hearing the score I just told you or beating yourself up by comparing your score to par?”

“But that’s not real!”

“Of course it isn’t! The whole point of our conversation was helping you develop your sense of *feel*. Reality has nothing to do with it.”

Dave finished inputting the numbers while Jonathan pushed the buzzer to call the modified cab to drive them up the twenty-foot incline to the clubhouse.

“Okay. You shot forty-two with a double bogey.”

“Hey…that’s not bad!’

“Damn straight! You think you would have shot in the eighties if you compared your score to par on every hole? Every shot would be life and death.”

“But I don’t get it. You didn’t change my swing. All you did was ask me questions.”

”Fascinating, isn’t it? Now it’s your turn. Is there anything still puzzling you?”
Jonathan considered momentarily.

“Do you recall asking me to check my shoelaces as we were walking to the third hole?”

”Of course.”

“You knew they were okay, didn’t you?”

Dave just shrugged and smiled.

“Why…?”

“If we were going to have any hope of salvaging a decent round, I needed to find a way of quickly interrupting your emotional outburst to the first two holes. Since emotion is created by motion, I figured that stopping you physically would interrupt your emotional reaction.”

“That makes sense I guess.”
Jonathan nods, then frowns.

“Wait a minute! Right after that you asked me about my shoes.”

“Right.”

“Do you really like the shoes or was that just another trick?”

“Ouch…that’s harsh! The shoes are very nice, but the real reason I asked was to calm you down before you got to the third tee. Looking back over the round, wouldn’t you say those little diversions put you in a better frame of mind?”

“Well…I did calm down. How about the pretending to be an announcer gimmick? What was the point of that?”

“Have you ever heard of dissociation?”

“Sure, it’s the opposite of association.”

“Interesting definition…I haven’t heard *that one* before. It’s another method of keeping the negative emotions at bay. Talking out loud is one way to silence the voices in your head and focus on the impending shot.”

“Oh man, when they hear me talking to myself out loud, the guys will *know* that I’ve flipped out!”

“You’re the only one who has to hear, besides you’re already talking to yourself inside all the time, it’s just that you’re not consciously aware of the dialogue.”
The transport vehicle arrived. Jonathan’s clubs were strapped to the side and both men hopped into the cab. At the top of the hill, they followed the pathway to the cart shed.

“Even though you drove me crazy at times, I feel that I owe you an apology. Could I buy you a beer?”

“Thanks, but I have to run. No need to apologize. You’ve given me enough material to write another book. Would you do me the honour of being the lead character – under a pseudonym of course?”

“Sure. But I have dibs on the first copy! Oh…come to think of it. There is something that’s been bugging me for a long time. Maybe you can offer an explanation?”

“Fire away!”

“Is there any reason why I can’t seem to take my practice swing to the golf course? After ten minutes on the range, I can hit two-hundred and fifty-yard drives straight as an arrow. Once I step onto the first tee, I’m half praying that I can just get past the forward tee blocks. What gives with that?”

“Consider this…apart from the fact that the practice range is level, has perfect grass, is forty yards wide and sheltered from the wind, there’s another factor.”

“Why am I not surprised…”.

“It’s like we talked about earlier. You’ve been spending the last twenty years constantly re-building your swing, in the belief that you can *consciously fix it.* By continually focusing on mistakes, they’ve become so ingrained that they start to automatically replay in your mind under game conditions.”

“Okay then. So, once I figure out how to stop replaying the poor memories, I’m good to go!”

“That’s a good start but it varies from day to day. Why do you think the tour players hit hundreds of balls every day? They want to discover the triggers that work on that particular day.”

“You mean it changes…?”

“Of course. How often do you hear about a player shooting sixty-seven one day and seventy-three the next? There’s no logical explanation.

It’s a game of *feel* and how you feel changes every day. The secret to consistency is paying attention.”

They arrive at the fork in the pathway; one road leads to the parking lot, the other to the practice range. Jonathan stops momentarily, looks at the parking lot then back to the practice range. They shake hands and Dave turns towards the parking lot.

“You’re not heading home?”
“Hell, no. I’m going to the range to see if I can start a new ritual. Heck, I might even park the car in a new spot next week.”

“Sorry if I made you feel like a bug under a microscope. I’ll send you a draft of the book before it goes into publication. I just haven’t figured out a title yet.”
Jonathan slips the bag over his shoulders, waves and heads for the practice range. He walks about twenty paces then stops abruptly and whirls around.
“Hey Dave, I’ve got the perfect title! How about “***Golfing Out of Your Mind*!”** How does that sound?”

Dave stops momentarily and considers.

“You know something, that’s not bad…not bad at all! Take care.”

THE NINTH LESSON

Finally, all these mental convolutions are beginning to make some sense.
The first key to reducing the effects of negative memories is developing some pattern interrupts. It could be something as simple as tying your shoes. Any action that interrupts the emotional fallout will work.

Here's a tip…you could use the same actions to start replaying the memories of success. The trick is discovering the ritual that works on any given day.

Our nervous system files new actions into an automated sequence so we don't have to consciously think about it. Tying your shoelaces will work initially to interrupt a negative pattern, but the effect will wear off over time.

Now you know why you need a series of pattern interrupts in your arsenal.
One of the biggest misconceptions among the high handicap golfer is the notion of muscle memory. Muscles respond to images of what to do instead of what not to do. It's the quality of your emotional reaction to the good shots that will produce permanent results.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book.

I hope the ideas will help you uncover the natural ability which only reveals itself when you are able to forget swing mechanics for one-and-a-half seconds and just hit the damn ball!

JONATHAN'S CLOSING COMMENTS

Although Dave and I have known each other for many years and have become good friends, the main events surrounding this book are true. The difference between myself and my alter-ego is that when Dave dispenses suggestions, I hang on every word without skepticism.

I am a real-life member at the Cedarbrae Golf Club. We did indeed play a few rounds with Dave acting as "mental coach". While I knew that Dave was gathering material for a new book, I had no idea our conversation on the golf course would serve as the soul for this manuscript.

Although he said far less in terms of advice during these rounds, I did somehow feel like a bug under a microscope.

Dave's love for the game and his students has never changed.

If you have ever taken a lesson from him, you might be startled by his robust exclamations of "*there you go!"* or *"that's the one!"* after a particularly good shot**.** At times, he seems to be more excited than the student at the accomplishment (hence the theme of the book regarding applauding and locking in your good shots!)

He has taken my game, with a tremendous amount of patience, from the high nineties to the low eighties. It still amazes me that (apart from keeping my head down), I don't have to worry about my swing.

The most difficult aspect of this approach for me was controlling my natural urge to rush between shots. As soon as the ball is struck, I wanted to run ahead. I had no idea how my physical actions affected my ability to control my memories.

Three years ago, I would have said that shooting in the seventies consistently was impossible.

Best wishes for a new chapter in your game!

Jonathan Levitt.

EPILOGUE

While the story you've just read is focused on helping "average" golfers break ninety, it's my hope that players at every skill level can apply some of the techniques to break out of the inevitable mental roadblocks that are endemic to the game.

I must apologize to Jonathan Levitt for making him out to be the "bad guy" in the story. While the majority of the dialogue is taken from actual conversations, I have to admit to using artistic license to emphasize key concepts.

The concepts are a simplified version of Neuro Linguistic programming (NLP) as popularized by Anthony Robbins. They are offered as an adjunct to traditional instruction.

While this manuscript revolves around the game of golf, you can easily adapt the techniques to improve your tennis, baseball and hockey.

Rehearsing your best shots for at least five minutes a day will produce amazing results in thirty days. Hitting more practice balls is a laudable goal, but for most of us (even those of us who teach the game for a living) all too often, life seems to get in the way.

Your memories are with you wherever you go. Learning to control them (and their effects) can be life altering. The secret is making it a habit. Your nervous system is always on guard, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It carries out its mission with fanatical zeal.

It is always on the lookout for any threat, real or imagined. As Jonathan discovered, its overzealous application can create the infamous “glass ceiling”.

Your mission (should you choose to accept it) is to train your nervous system so you can consistently access the innate ability that every golfer displays when they hit a perfect shot.

Simply reading this book will only produce temporary effects. In order to achieve permanent improvement, pick out the chapters that are relevant to your unique situation. You can apply the techniques of pattern interrupts and reinforcing good memories in every aspect of life.

While the three books in the series were written independently, their effects are cumulative when read in sequential order. Each volume was written after a three-month hiatus from writing, during which I considered common questions and reviews as the basis for the next volume.

If you enjoyed the book, I would appreciate a brief review.

Thank you for your enthusiastic response to this series. I look forward to helping you play better than you ever thought possible!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Johnston obtained his degree in Psychology from York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

He is a twenty-five-year member of the Canadian Professional Golfers' Association and Director of Instruction at the Bloomington Downs Golf Club in Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada (since 1983) He has taught over eleven-thousand lessons.

The Just Hit The Damn Ball! book series is based on the belief that common misconceptions about proper technique are the biggest roadblock to improvement for the once-a-week golfer.

Dave's YouTube channel currently has 1925 subscribers.

Your comments would be much appreciated!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Harvey Patterson, (actor, writer, golf addict) for his patience and encouragement.

Jonathan Levitt, for agreeing to play the “bad guy” in the series. The cheque is in the mail.

Gail Hardman, (long-suffering student) for helping me appreciate the trials of the once-a-week golfer.

Dr. Karl Morris, for taking the time to read this manuscript and offer insights gleaned from working with the best golfers in the world.

Rick Davis, (TV producer), for his guidance in helping me create an on-line persona.

Kenton Palamar (Palamar Graphics) for converting my hairbrained concepts into brilliant cover designs.

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BONUS CHAPTER

Stop Beating Yourself Up!

(How To Play Your Best Golf Despite Years of Lessons)

STOP BEATING YOURSELF UP!
HOW TO PLAY
YOUR BEST GOLF
DESPITE YEARS OF LESSONS
"a highly recommended tool for golf fans!"
Dave Johnston, B.A. Psychology
Director of Golf Instruction
Author: Just Hit The Damn Ball!

★★★★★ **Opened my eyes !**

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on October 22, 2018

Format: Kindle Edition | **Verified Purchase**

FOREWORD

Do you invest in regular instruction and practice diligently, but only see marginal improvement? How often do you start a new season, reviewing the faulty swing mechanics that were exorcised last Fall?

This book will help you break through the proverbial "glass ceiling". Your fundamental (unconscious) beliefs about the game are the gateway to consistently playing to the best of your ability.

Are you familiar with the maxim that golf is ninety percent mental? What happens to your swing during the ten-minute walk from the practice range to the first tee?

The biggest roadblock to improvement isn't faulty technique. A knowledge of basic swing mechanics is a prerequisite, but the secret to constant improvement.is learning how to stop beating yourself up.

Traditional instruction is based on technical perfection; the underlying assumption is that you must constantly focus on proper technique. In other words, you have to continually review your mistakes in order to forget them.

Makes perfect sense doesn't it?

Have you ever hit a perfect shot? Of course, you have! How would you define perfection? Every golfer, at every skill level, can relate to the indescribable feeling of hitting the “sweetspot".

Can you recall what you were thinking just prior to hitting the last perfect shot?

When I posed the question to a group of fifty students in a seminar, only two could recall the actual pre-swing thought process. The majority could only recall the effortless feeling of perfect contact.

If you've ever hit a perfect shot, then you have the ability. The first step in re-creating those shots, is learning how to consistently re-create that effortless feeling.

Every golfer is affected by their unconscious beliefs. The worlds' best players understand that these beliefs must be constantly monitored and reinforced. This is the missing link that is often overlooked in traditional instruction.

My goal is to help you understand the power of beliefs and give you the tools to stop beating yourself up!

INTRODUCTION

This book is a transcript of nine conversations with a student named John (yes, that's his real name).

My previous acquaintance with John was simply a casual "*how's it going*?" whenever I passed him on the practice range every Sunday morning at 8:30.

My Sunday mornings were devoted to a casual breakfast at the golf club, where I could review the previous week's lesson notes in the confines of a secluded corner booth overlooking the practice range.

I settled into my regular window seat, coffee in hand, and gazed absent-mindedly at golfers carrying two jumbo sized buckets of balls onto the range. My impression was that most of these golfers entertained the belief that, sooner or later, they would discover the key to "digging out" the secret to a perfect swing.

My reverie was shattered by a rush of wind as the double-doors flung open and John stormed in! Judging from his demeanor, I imagined that his golf clubs were destined to be auctioned off to the highest bidder on Ebay within the hour.

I waved John over and motioned him to pull up a chair.

"You look like you're about ready to quit..."

John:(plunking down into the chair) "I can't believe it! I just lost two dollars to an old friend who hasn't picked up the clubs in four years. He just steps up and smacks the ball. No idea that his left elbow bends like a pretzel. His feet dance around like he's on hot coals and he falls backwards on every Drive, but he still manages to keep the ball in play!"

John took a deep breath then continued in rapid machine-gun style.

“He doesn't give a damn about form. I can just imagine what the guys will think when we get together next week."

"Two bucks isn’t that much…"

John: "It’s not the money. I play every Sunday and practice three times a week. I should be able to beat him by ten strokes! I even gave him a tip about his grip before we teed off."

"Let me buy you a beer."

I ordered two drafts and asked John to fill me in.

"How’s the practice going? I see you hitting balls every weekend."

John: (gulping down half the beer) "Thanks for the beer. It’s driving me nuts. I can fix my swing on the range, but for some weird reason, it always seems to fall apart on the golf course."

"What do you usually shoot?"

John: "Anywhere from eighty-eight to ninety-two. My best score is eighty-three, but that’s only because I was making every putt inside twenty feet."

"And that’s a bad thing?"

John: "Well…I can’t do it all the time."

"I’ve got news for you…neither can the pros you watch on television."

John: "I guess..."

I had been struggling to come up for a topic in an upcoming seminar, when a rather shameful idea popped into my head. Given his present state of mind, John would be a perfect candidate for the experiment.

"I have a proposition for you. Would you be willing to stop hitting balls for a month?"

John: "Uh…how is that going to help?"

"Leave that to me. Let’s get together every Sunday morning for the next month or so and see if we can get your game on track. The goal will be breaking eighty-five. How does that sound?"

John: "Okay... I guess. But I'll have to try and squeeze in the practice sessions during my lunch hour."

"You're not hearing me. I want to stop practicing for the next month."

John polished off the rest of his beer, plunked the glass down and slouched back into the brass-studded, overstuffed club chair. He flung one leg over the arm of the chair, scrunched up his face and gave me the proverbial Mister Spock expression.

John: "Let me get this straight. You want me to give up practicing and playing for a month?"

"Practice yes, playing no. Keep your regular game, but no practicing in-between."

John: "Mmm...okay, I guess. But what's the point?"

"Afraid you'll just have to trust me for now. What do you say?"

John: "Well, I've tried everything else without any real improvement, so what the hell..."

"Alright. Can we start next week?"

John: "Sure. But what is this going to cost me? I've already spent three-hundred dollars on a driving range card. I've about used up my quota of brownie points."

"Tell you what. You buy the beer and I'll take care of the rest."

John: "Sounds fair enough. (pointing at the empty beer glass) How about a refill?"

"Next time. Let's have some lunch and you can fill me in on what happened out there today."

That was how this book began.

John went on to tell me that he had read over five-hundred golf books. He was the local "driving range pro." His profound knowledge of swing mechanics was extolled by friends who frequently came to him for advice.

Despite his reputation, John's handicap hovered around sixteen.

I hope you can relate.

If you've ever had the feeling that you could (or maybe even should) be playing better than you do, then let this book be a catalyst to take your game to a whole new level!

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